+ ENGLISH

News

Tibetans Say the Dalai Lama's 'Suck My Tongue' Viral Video Is Being Misinterpreted

Tibet's exiled spiritual leader has often courted controversy for his off-the-cuff jokes that his supporters say are "lost in translation."

Listen to this article now 7 min listen
00:00 1.0× -07:12
Powered by Trinity Audio

By Pallavi Pundir
JAKARTA, ID

11 April 2023, 3:19pm

A SCREENGRAB FROM THE VIRAL VIDEO TAKEN ON FEB.28 IN THE NORTHERN INDIAN CITY OF DHARAMSHALA, WHERE TIBETAN SPIRITUAL LEADER THE DALAI LAMA HAS BEEN RUNNING THE INDEPENDENT TIBETAN GOVERNMENT IN EXILE.

A viral video showing the Dalai Lama asking a boy to "suck" his tongue has stunned the global Tibetan community. Many believe the video is being widely

ADVERTISEMENT

On Monday, the Dalai Lama's office issued an apology for the video of a meet-and-greet in February in the northern Indian city of Dharamshala—where Tibet's highest spiritual leader has been running an independent government in exile since 1959.

In the video, the Dalai Lama is approached by a boy—whose identity is not known—for a hug, the exiled leader hugs him and asks the child to kiss him on his cheek. After that, the Dalai Lama pointed to his lips and said, "here also." Then he held the boy's chin and kissed him on the lips.

The Dalai Lama then said, "suck my tongue," and stuck his tongue out. In Tibet, sticking out the tongue is a traditional greeting that goes back to the 9th century. The crowd burst out laughing and the Dalai Lama hugged the child again and spoke about peace.

It's unclear why the video has gone viral now. It started getting reshared last week with many social media accounts framing it as inappropriate, going as far as to call it child abuse and pedophilia. Many of the critical posts are from China or by accounts in India, the country that's given the leader a safe refuge for decades.

Tsering Kyi, a US-based Tibetan journalist, told VICE World News that the Dalai Lama has been a CCP target for the last 70 years, adding that the current incident is the result of another attempt to discredit him, combined with misinterpretations of Tibetan culture.

ADVERTISEMENT

Tech

Hackers Tried to Compromise Phones of Tibetans Working for Dalai Lama

LORENZO FRANCESCHI-BICCHIERAI

"I still remember when the great Christian spiritual leader, Desmond Tutu, visited the Dalai Lama in India, and they hugged and kissed like two pure kids," she said. "It was a beautiful display of love, but some people with dirty minds interpreted it as something else back then too."

Dalai Lama jokingly made a kissing face to greet his friend Desmond Tutu, only those with a severe case of porn brain could see this as sexual

10:19 AM · Apr 11, 2023

556 Reply Copy link

Read 201 replies

"English is his second language, so sometimes His Holiness uses words that make some people uncomfortable," Kyi added. "However, it doesn't necessarily mean that he intends to be negative."

Another Tibetan living in India, who spoke to VICE World News on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisals from those cancelling the Dalai Lama online, said that Tibetans often greet each other with their tongues out.

"It's been our traditional way of greeting," they said. "I have also seen [the Dalai Lama] being playful with Tibetans. For us, it is sad that it has been

this will be made into an issue later," the person said.

The leader is counted among the most influential political and spiritual figures in the world. The 87-year-old became the Dalai Lama at the age of four, but fled to India in 1959 when he was 23 years old as he feared arrest following an unsuccessful uprising against the Chinese occupation in the Tibetan capital Lhasa. He's been in exile in India ever since.

ADVERTISEMENT

On Monday, the Dalai Lama's press office issued an apology. "His Holiness wishes to apologise to the boy and his family, as well as his many friends across the world, for the hurt his words may have caused," the statement shared with VICE World News read. "His Holiness often teases people he meets in an innocent and playful way, even in public and before cameras. He regrets the incident."

The VICE Guide to Right Now

The Dalai Lama Feels His Female Successor Has to Be Attractive or There's "Not Much Use"

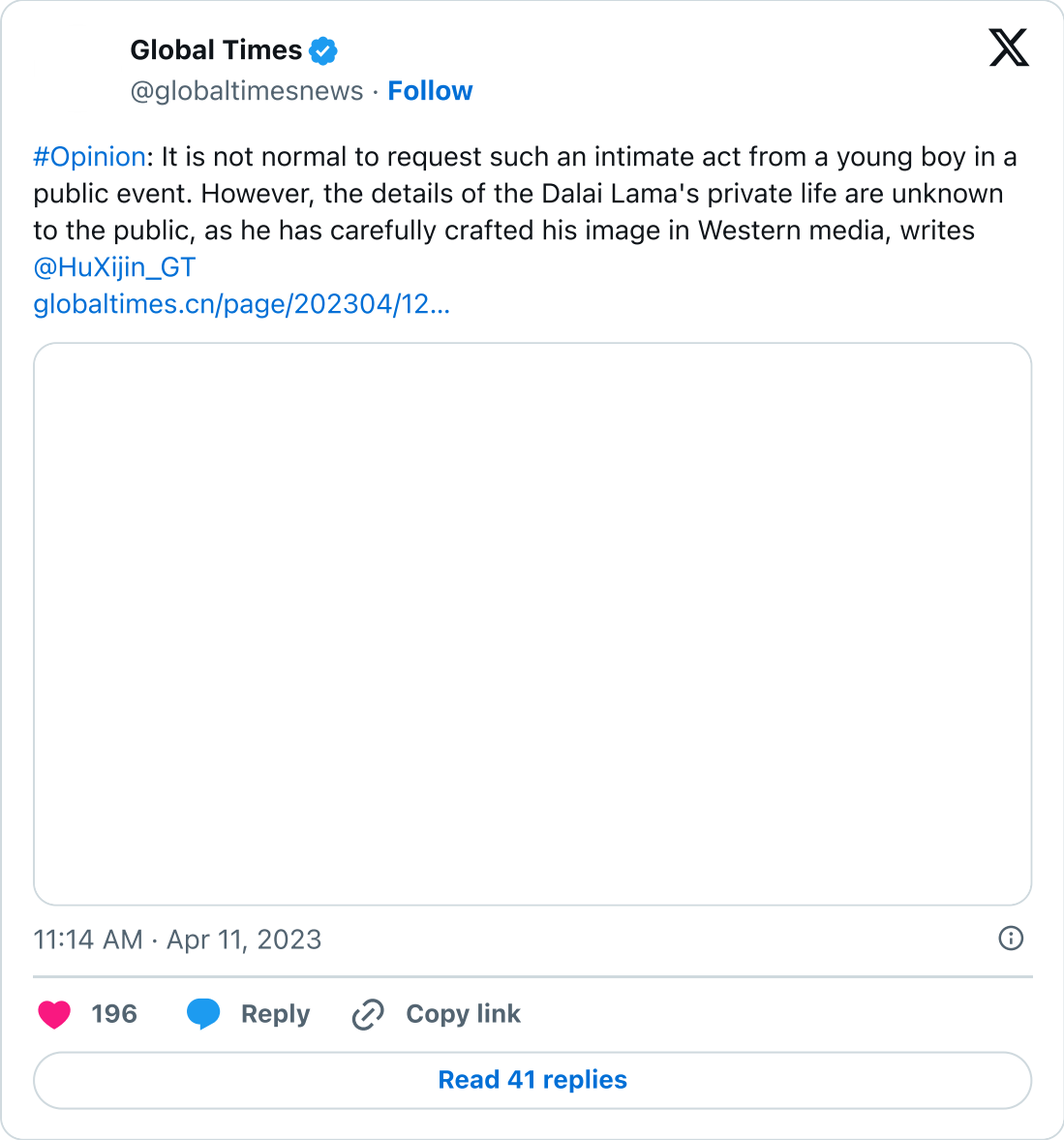
SHAMANI JOSHI

06.28.19

The statement doesn't further explain the comments the Dalai Lama made or his actions.

Timothy Grose, associate professor of China studies at the Indiana-based Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology, told VICE World News that

that he seeks from China.



Tibetan human rights groups have previously documented online campaigns aiming to discredit the Dalai Lama and paint occupied Tibet as a "contented and idyllic Chinese province" despite several instances of self-immolation—a form of violent protest that's become prevalent in Tibetan people's resistance to China.

ADVERTISEMENT

"The Chinese seizure of this part of Tibetan history is meant to fit [its] claim of liberating Tibet," said Grose.

Some viral critical posts are coming from China. One account, run by a man called Keawe Wong, accused the Dalai Lama of owning undeclared wealth and slaves. "Before Tibet was liberated by the Chinese Communist Party, life looked like this," the account says, showing the screengrab of the viral video, adding that before the Chinese "liberation," Tibetan lamas were "serf owners".

China's official stance on Tibet labels its occupation akin to the "emancipation of slavery in the U.S. in 1862" and calls the Dalai Lama the "largest slave owner" in a serfdom-like feudal system—a claim dismissed as inaccurate by Tibetan people and historians.

Another post by Sameera Khan—a U.S.-based right-wing pundit who uses the hashtag #MuslimMaga and has previously been criticized by Tibetan media for parroting Beijing's talking points—accused the U.S. government of "[recruiting] a pedophile to weaken/destabilize China."

ADVERTISEMENT

him and Tibet.

There has been no statement from the Indian NGO M3M Foundation that organised this meet-and-greet, or the boy's family so far. The incident is not the Dalai Lama's first controversy, and in 2019 he apologised for saying that if a woman were to succeed him "she should be more attractive." In his official statement then, the Dalai Lama said that his "off the cuff" remarks in one cultural context often lose their humour in translation.

News

Inside the Secret Tibetan Force That Is Helping India Take On China

DANISH RAZA

10.02.20

Jamyang Phuntsok, a Tibetan filmmaker and podcaster in India, told VICE World News that it's possible to acknowledge both the innocence of the Dalai Lama and the outrage of people across the world. The video made him feel awkward, he admitted, but the context is missing.

"I'm sure that the Dalai Lama had no bad or evil intentions, and that it came, to some extent, from the naivete of how such gestures might be interpreted in our modern, hyper-sexualised society," he said.

"But for many non-Tibetans, it's easier to feel outrage and condemn than to delve deeper into what kind of a man he is, what he represents and means for so many oppressed people around the world."

"Such is the fickle nature of fame and infamy."

Follow Pallavi Pundir on Twitter.

TAGGED: INDIA,WORLDNEWS,SOUTH ASIA,DALAI LAMA,CHINA

0

MORE FROM VICE

News

2020: A Year Like No Other

VICE VIDEO

12.31.20

News

A Brief History of Non-Indians Hating On Indian Food

PALLAVI PUNDIR

10.09.20

ADVERTISEMENT

© 2024 VICE MEDIA GROUP